



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



Parable of the Rich Fool: Rembrandt, 1627



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Oblatio Sui

*Lord, take all my freedom.
Accept my memory,
my understanding,
And my entire will.
You have given me all that I have or hold dear.
I return it to you,
that it may be governed by your will.
Give me only your grace
and the gift of loving you,
And I will be rich enough;
I will ask for nothing more.
Amen.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy exhorts believers to be diligent and persevere when it comes to living the Christian life.
- ▶ We are reminded that without God life is meaningless.
- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading 1: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23

- ▶ The Book of Ecclesiastes is a meditation on the ever changing and oft-times pointlessness of this life.
- ▶ Ecclesiastes comes from the Greek. The etymology of the word means someone who calls an assembly.
- ▶ The etymology of the word *vanity* means breath, vapor, air, empty, etc.
- ▶ The author of the book was hardly an optimist. His overall tone is sobering. He leaves no room for illusion or denial, proposing instead a stark realism.
- ▶ As far as the author is concerned nothing one does in this life has meaning. Life unto itself is meaningless—the only thing that gives life meaning is God and God's relationship to humanity. All else is rubbish.
- ▶ Ecclesiastes prepares the way for the person of Christ. There is no sugar coated, feed-good religion here. It prepares believers for the cross of struggle and the cross of victory that one must embrace when one accepts the Paschal Mystery of Christ as his or her primary foundation. Christianity is hardly a "feel good" religion as some today have desperately tried to suggest.
- ▶ Jesus was not teaching the prosperity theology that is so prevalent in televangelism today.
- ▶ The bottom line for this author is that separated from God human life has absolutely no meaning.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ This author’s stark realism is sobering and at times rather depressing. How do you feel about this author’s assumption that we must not be blind to the bad in our lives if we are ever going to be able to embrace the good?
- ▶ What is the bad in your life that you need to see in order to embrace the good?
- ▶ Many televangelists communicate a message that says, “If you just donate your time, talent and mostly your treasure God will give you every kind of material blessing—God promises you wealth and prosperity? Has that been your experience? Do you know anyone that can boast of such an experience? What does such a message accomplish in the hearts of believers? What is a better message?
- ▶ Do you think it is possible for an atheist to find meaning in this life? If so, how? If the answer is: through family, friends, wealth, etc. then the next question necessarily is: “What happens when all those things are taken away? How then does the atheist find meaning in life?”
- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?

Second Reading: Colossians 3, 1-5. 9-11

- ▶ Paul’s catechism today insists that faithful followers of Christ must never become lackadaisical.
- ▶ If they truly wish to live out their baptismal calling they must be earnest and disciplined in their commitment to follow Christ.
- ▶ Christianity is not to be an outlet or an escape from the struggles of everyday life.
- ▶ Christians are to be attentive to the concerns of this world while at the same time participate in the life of Christ who dwells within.
- ▶ Christians are to offer their own lives in service of God’s people.
- ▶ When Paul insisted that we are created in the image of God, he was denouncing the influence of gnosticism that was so prevalent in his community.
- ▶ Human beings were created in the image of God at the creation of the world.
- ▶ Faithful to their baptismal calling, the people of God are empowered to know the mind and heart of God—to be converted in mind, heart and soul—a true metanoia—a turning of one’s life completely over to God.
- ▶ Gnosticism’s so called privileged knowledge of a few elite devotees contrasts sharply from the Christian’s knowledge of Jesus Christ crucified. The former is for a few; the latter is for all.
- ▶ There are no distinctions in the Body of Christ. All are equal; none are set apart as

more privileged in status than any other.

- ▶ The Christian is called to a life of faithful obedience to God's will and untiring commitment to his or her baptismal life.
- ▶ Today's reading lists various virtues, vices and sins—a common Hellenistic literary tool of the ancient world.
- ▶ Such a listing is a reminder that God's judgment is coming soon.
- ▶ Paul's intention in this reading is to communicate the complete gratuitous action of Christ who offered his life as a sacrifice for the many.
- ▶ The Christian can do no less than respond in faith for so great a gift. The Christian does not extend faith so as to “get something” in return. Believers have already received before faith was ever extended—Jesus Christ freely offered his life; we have been given the Paschal Mystery of Christ.
- ▶ We can do no less than respond to this amazing gift each and every day of our lives.
- ▶ The “putting off the old self” probably referred to the baptismal robe of the baptismal ritual. The newly baptized took off their clothes of sin and donned new clothes of righteousness. It was a reference to conversion, metanoia and transformation—a turning away from the sin in one's life.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Unfortunately Christian communities have always been plagued by influences and people that set them apart as holier than others in the community. It is part of the human condition. Jesus reached out to the sinner—not the exalted elites. His message was for all and he went out to the highways, byways and city streets to communicate his message. He did not associate with the self-righteous. Have you ever been in the presence of a person, persons or a group of persons who seemed to communicate superiority in relation to things spiritual? How did that make you feel? If you have not experienced it, how do you think it would make you feel?
- ▶ Why was this a destructive force in Paul's community? Why is it a destructive force in today's community? What is the lesson for us today?
- ▶ Why does Paul place such importance on a person's baptismal calling? Why is it so important?
- ▶ How does a person live a disciplined, committed baptismal life? What does that involve?

- ▶ What does it mean to you that this reading exhorts the reader to embrace their baptismal calling and to be thankful for our knowledge of Jesus Christ crucified? How would you describe your commitment to your life in Christ? What does that mean to you?
- ▶ How can we appropriate Paul's message in our lives today? What are the implications of what Paul is teaching the Colossians?

Gospel: Luke 11: 1-13. Luke 12, 13-21

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ The rich fool did not believe he needed God. He was in control of his own life.
- ▶ At the end he was stunned to discover that God (not he) was in complete control of his life.
- ▶ Life is pure gift. Possessions are meaningless and can do nothing to give life meaning. Possessions do not offer security.
- ▶ The faithful disciple understands that wealth is to be shared not hoarded. Thus, the loving response to God's gift of life is to share one's possessions with others.
- ▶ Jesus continues to invite his disciples to understand the implications of the journey they are making to Jerusalem.
- ▶ Someone in their entourage broke the flow of the serious discussion they were having by asking Jesus to weigh in on a dispute over inheritance. While laws governed such issues, Jesus used the question as a teachable moment.
- ▶ Luke's Jesus taught them about the distracting, addictive and seductive nature of possessions. Possessions play into human fear over the fleeting nature of life.
- ▶ The rich fool in the parable placed his trust in his land and his harvest; surely they would secure his future.
- ▶ At the end of his life, however, none of it mattered—nothing was left. All that he had counted on to provide the security he was seeking had vanished.
- ▶ The implication for the Christian disciple is to realize that possessions are nothing but burdens that weigh us down when undue importance is placed upon them. Christians are to detach from such worldly follies.
- ▶ In theory and in practice disciples are to literally "be not afraid."
- ▶ Life is pure gift but it is also fragile; it is freely given and freely received. True spiritual freedom can only occur when believers turn their lives over to God's care.
- ▶ We must live each day with our focus on God not our possessions. God is in control of our lives. Not only are disciples exhorted to abandon their lives to

God's providential care but in turn they are to share the gift of themselves and their possessions with others. Disciples should sell what they have and give it to the poor. Only then will they know true spiritual freedom.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the only ultimate truth in this life according to this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about possessions? What are the implications for our contemporary world today?
- ▶ What does the rich fool have to teach Christians today?
- ▶ In what way is this Gospel an invitation to a closer relationship with God?
- ▶ What can you do to foster that intimacy? Based on this Gospel, what would Jesus tell you? How would he answer that question.
- ▶ What is Jesus' message about riches and those who are rich? Jesus is hardly condemning the rich, but he is offering a stern warning. What is that warning? How is his warning a message for each and every one of us?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Christian mission?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. The Christian journey is fraught with twists, turns and bumps. It is not an easy journey; but it is deeply meaningful. The trials and tribulations of life—especially the ongoing, chronic—never-go-away type of trial, has taught me that life indeed is meaningless without reliance on the power and presence of God to lead, guide and be Emmanuel in my life. I have seen miraculous answers to prayer and resolution of very difficult situations. I have also experienced God's silence. God's miraculous actions throughout my life have been touch stone experiences; I call on them and remember them during the difficult times—when it seems as though God is not listening. When difficult situations never seem to change but chronically continue through the years, peace and joy is achieved when I abandon my life to God's care. It is all that matters.

#2. When I am not diligent in my commitment to prayer and my baptismal responsibility to live as priest to serve God's people, prophet, to proclaim God's word in word and deed and king to lead people to Christ, I can easily slip into boredom and worse amnesia. The Christian life calls me to be diligent and focused. There are times that I long for a return to the early days of my awakened conversion—the outward passion was palpable. My constant prayer is that God renew that passion in me. It is indeed renewed every Holy Week when I reflect on the Paschal Mystery of Christ---his life, passion, death and resurrection. The challenge is to keep that passion alive throughout the year. Daily prayer and meditation on Christ's profound sacrificial gift of self is the only way I am able to sustain that fervor.

#3. Today's Gospel is a very important message that I need to hear again and again. I can very easily become distracted by my desire for possessions. They are extremely seductive. There have been times that I have fixated on something I wanted to purchase and have not rested until it ended up in my house. If that does not betray an over-attachment to worldly goods nothing does. Today's Gospel is a reminder that worldly possessions in and of themselves are not evil, but they can be and most often are a distraction. The gift of detachment is a daily enterprise—only through prayer and the grace of God am I able to detach from an inordinate desire for material goods.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Prayer
Miracles
Catholic Social teaching
Eschatology
Faith
Life Issues
Jesus Christ
Revelation I or II
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

PRAYER

Today's parable of the rich fool is a reminder to us that we must detach from worldly possessions and focus our complete attention on God. The seduction of possessions is so great that prayer is the only antidote. If we are to remain faithful to his teaching we must foster our intimate relationship with him. The only way this is accomplished is through prayer. Thus the focus of our extended session today will be PRAYER.

MIRACLES

God desires intimate communion with his people. All the readings today are a reminder that life without God is meaningless. The miracles of Scripture and the miracles of our lives are one means God has used to enter into that communion. Remembering (anamnesis—a remembering that makes present) the miracles when times are difficult helps us walk through the hard times to a future better day. Life is not meaningless when we focus our attention on God. Today would be an appropriate time to reflect on God's miracles that help us find meaning in life when life seems meaningless. Thus the focus of today's extended doctrinal session will be MIRACLES.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Jesus rallies his disciples and reminds them that possessions are seductive and get in the way of our relationship with God. He warns the rich and reminds us not to hoard our possessions but to share what God has given us. That is certainly the mandate of CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING-- the focus of today's extended doctrinal session.

ESCHATOLOGY

Jesus' parable of the rich fool is a reminder that choices we make in this life affect our life after death. We are to share what we have with others, detach from our possessions and enter into communion with God. In so doing disciples can be confident of sharing eternal life with God forever. Thus, today would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about ESCHATOLOGY, HEAVEN, and HELL AND PURGATORY.

FAITH

Today's liturgy is an extended invitation to grow in faith. Life without God is meaningless. Life without faith in God is equally meaningless. Thus, today's liturgy exhorts us to increase our faith in God. The focus of our extended doctrinal session will be FAITH.

LIFE ISSUES

If life is pure gift from God as today's liturgy affirms, then all life is sacred, a complete gratuitous gift from God. We thus must treasure and respect life in all its forms. In so doing we will find deep meaning for our lives. Today our doctrinal focus will be Church teaching in relation to LIFE ISSUES.

JESUS CHRIST

Each Sunday would be an appropriate time to reflect on Jesus the Christ. Today is a most appropriate time as Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem, the climax of his saving mission. Thus, today our extended session will be on JESUS CHRIST.

REVELATION I or II

Jesus reveals his intimacy with his Father as he continues to invite disciples into deeper relationship with God. The entire Gospel is revelatory—that is, it seeks to reveal God to believers. Today would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on REVELATION.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.